

The Amazing Soybean

Are you allergic to cow's milk? If you are, you can still enjoy a milk shake or milk with your cereal—if you choose soy milk. It tastes somewhat like cow's milk, but it's different. It's made from soybeans!

The soybean is a relative of the pea. The United States grows more soybeans than any other country. We also grow more soybeans than any other crop except for corn and wheat. Most of the U.S. soybean crop goes to feed dairy cows and other livestock. However, soybeans are becoming more and more popular for other uses.

Soybeans are often made into oil or ground into flour. Soy flour is used in products as different as baby food, candy, pet food, and pancakes. Soy milk is becoming more and more popular as Americans try to limit the amount of cholesterol, or animal fat, in their diets. Dairy products like cow's milk are high in cholesterol. Many people find soy milk a perfect substitute. It is high in protein and low in fat and cholesterol, which makes it a good source of nutrition.

Soybeans are used for other things besides food. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, automobile maker Henry Ford tried to find ways to help American farmers, who were suffering because of falling prices for their crops. Ford promised the farmers higher prices if they grew soybeans, because soybean oil formed the base of high-quality enamel for painting Ford cars! Ford also used soybean meal to make different plastic car parts, such as buttons for horns. Ford cars were upholstered with a fabric that contained 20 percent soybean wool. Ford even sometimes wore an outfit made from soybean fiber. There's no doubt about it, soybeans certainly are useful little beans!

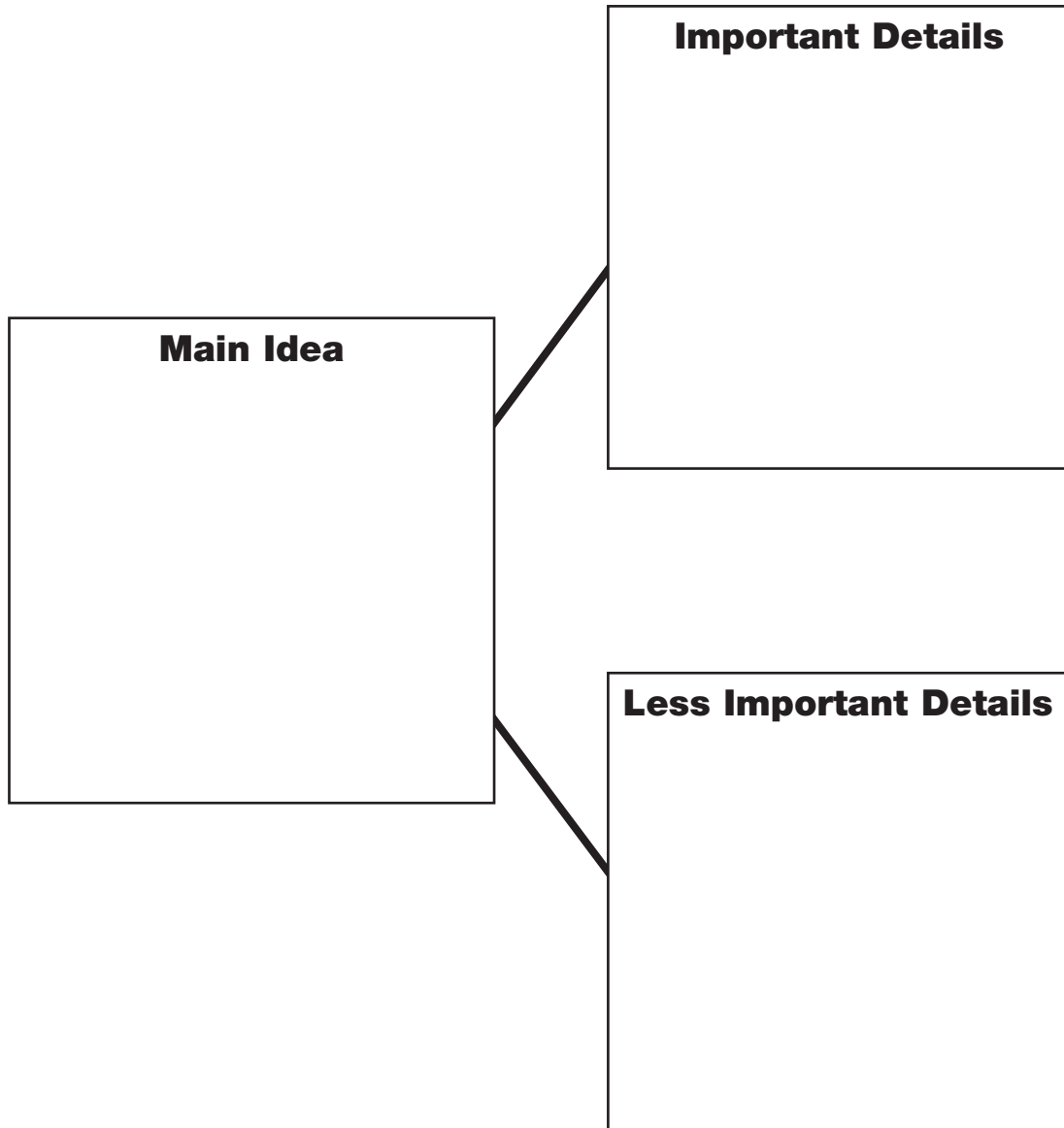
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